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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 21 April 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus addressed to the Secretary-General

On the instructions of my Government, I have the honour to forward herewith the Final Document of the International Conference on Sustainable Development of Countries with Economies in Transition,* which took place in Minsk from 16 to 18 April 1997.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this Final Document circulated as an official document of the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development under agenda item 4.

(Signed) Alyaksandr SYCHOU
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Belarus
to the United Nations

* The attachment is circulated in the language of submission.

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FINAL DOCUMENT
of the International Conference on Sustainable Development of Countries with Economies in Transition (16-18 April 1997, Minsk, Belarus)

1. The International Conference on Sustainable Development of Countries with Economies in Transition was held in Minsk from 16 to 18 April 1997 with participation of Ministers of the Environment and Economy of countries with economies in transition, representatives and leaders of UN Secretariat, UNDP, UN/ECE, UNEP, WHO, IAEA, UNIDO, OECD, OSCE, CIS Secretariat and CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, other international organisations, NGOs, institutions. The Conference aimed at evaluating the progress made in the field of implementing sustainable development principles in countries with economies in transition, identifying the major priorities and problems in this regard.

2. The Organization of the United Nations has repeatedly reaffirmed the importance of regional and national efforts and initiatives for achieving sustainable development. The International Conference on Sustainable Development of Countries with Economies in Transition held in the Republic of Belarus is such an initiative, important contribution to preparing the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21.

3. The participants of the Conference have evaluated the progress made in the field of applying the principles of sustainable development in countries with economies in transition, identified major problems and weak points in this realm. The participants of the Conference have taken into consideration information on the activities and plans of the United Nations Organisation and its agencies to promote sustainable development in countries with economies in transition.

4. The participants of the Conference consider the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, that on the threshold of the 21st century 'the humanity stands at a defining moment in history', to be of particular relevance to countries with economies in transition. The burden of problems inherited from the past and peculiarities

of the transition period predetermine the complexity and depth of transformations needed.

5. Notwithstanding the numerous difficulties our countries are facing today a consecutive transition to sustainable development should be brought about to resolve socio-economic problems, protect the environment and satisfy the needs of present generations and ones to come pursuant to the provisions of Agenda 21. Efforts in this direction would contribute to reaching another goal, i.e. the integration of countries with economies in transition into the world economy.

6. The transition to sustainable development demands co-ordinated efforts of all countries and a re-orientation of social, economic and environmental institutions. A changing nature of State's participation in economic activities establishes prerequisites for private initiatives. In so doing, the responsibility of a State as a guarantor of environmental protection and environmental safety remains high.

7. Democratization of public life helps citizens and non-governmental organizations play a larger role in environmental decision-making.

8. In time the very notion of sustainable development will be evolving and becoming more specific, its principles should be therefore implemented step by step. At the stage of ongoing economic reforms and strengthening market principles it is of utmost importance to integrate environmental, economic and social policies, to lay down the foundations for sustainable structures of production and consumption, and for ecologically grounded economic policy and management using sustainable development indicators.

9. Market mechanisms and application of the polluter-pays and user-pays principles combined with State regulation are to develop economic incentives to foster a caring attitude towards natural resources and the environment.

10. Efforts should be continued to set up national mechanisms for the transition to sustainable development, paying particular attention to the sectoral problems of Agenda 21. Principles and priorities of sustainable

development should be taken into account when preparing socio-economic forecasts and programmes.

11. The participants of the Conference are convinced that the aspiration of countries with economies in transition to get integrated into the world economy must be underpinned by international measures to assist these countries in their transition to sustainable development. The participants of the Conference appeal to donor States and international financial institutions to earmark adequate resources for strengthening the national capacities of countries with economies in transition and for facilitating their access to environmentally sound technologies.

12. Understanding that inadequate implementation by a country or a group of countries of international environmental commitments brings to naught the efforts of other members of the world community, the participants of the Conference have declared their readiness to participate actively in implementing global and regional environmental conventions and call for more substantial assistance to countries with economies in transition to extend their participation and promote their observance of the aforementioned conventions.

13. The participants of the Conference draw attention to a need for stirring up international efforts under way to resolve the Chernobyl problem, rehabilitate the Aral region, prevent consequences of floods of the Caspian Sea, restore an ecological equilibrium of transboundary water courses and big reservoirs (Lake Sevang, Lake Sarezskoe, Lake Baikal, Lake Issyk Kul), mitigate consequences of other major environmental disasters and protect most ecologically vulnerable zones and regions in countries with economies in transition. We are convinced of the need to consolidate international efforts in this sphere.

14. The participants of the Conference emphasize the importance of strengthening the activities of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development and concentrating its efforts on key issues of sustainable development of global significance. At the same time, the participants of the Conference call for a further regionalization of the United Nations activities for the implementation of Agenda 21, which would allow more attention to be paid to the specific problems of

individual regions, including those of countries with economies in transition.

15. Interaction priorities of countries with economies in transition in the sphere of ensuring sustainable development consist in the following:

- organization of international partnership to resolve problems of the transition to sustainable development;

- active participation in international scientific programmes on this problem

- development of legal acts ensuring that the legislative basis for sustainable development is being formed

16. The participants of the Conference reckon it as useful to:

- Use the development of the 'Environment for Europe' process for the implementation of Agenda 21 in countries with economies in transition, paying particular attention to such issues as energy saving, transport and the environment, economic tools for environmental policies.
- Take an active part in preparing the Fourth Ministerial Conference 'Environment for Europe' (Aarhus, Denmark, 1998) and the Third European Interministerial Conference on Environment and Health (London, 1999) as important stages in introducing the concept of sustainable development in countries with economies in transition.
- Request the UN/ECE to prepare periodic reviews of the progress made by its member countries in achieving sustainable development, organize a series of workshops to exchange experience in preparing national sustainable development strategies, and initiate the development of guidelines for the integration of environmental policy and economic and sectoral ones in countries with economies in transition.
- Invite UNDP, UNEP and other UN bodies and agencies and international organizations to make a contribution within their powers to the implementation of the provisions of the Conference final document.
- Consider the possibility of organizing in some appropriate time a follow-up conference on sustainable development of countries with economies in transition.

- Improve environmental information and education systems and set up national legal systems ensuring access to environmental information and public participation in environmental decision-making, and support in this respect efforts being undertaken by governments of ECE member countries to draft a convention on this question.

17. The participants of the Conference request the Conference Chairman to report this final document at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly for the review of the implementation of Agenda 21 (June 1997) and transmit it to the leaders of countries with economies in transition as well as international organizations concerned.